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- [1](#)1. Lead Stories Summary

ZDF-TV's early evening newscast Heute and ARD-TV's early evening newscast Tagesschau opened with stories on Deutsche Bank's drastic losses of 3.9 billion euros in 2008. Most newspapers also led with stories on the financial crisis, FAZ's cover story dealt with the response the German government's economic stimulus package. Editorials focused on Deutsche Bank, the German stimulus package and the Gaza conflict.

- [1](#)2. Israel-Hamas Conflict

Die Welt editorialized that "Israel cannot defeat, but can only weaken Hamas;" and adds: "Rocket attacks on Israel cannot be completely prevented, but it has become clear that Hamas will not find the exit from the piles of ruins if it does not agree on a ceasefire. And there is a second change: the international community has become more critical and is no longer impressed by the propaganda war. Journalists now realize what kind of propaganda they bought during the Lebanon war."

S|ddeutsche commented on UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon's efforts: "Given Hamas' bunker mentality and the merciless Israeli warfare, the calls of UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon to put a stop to the fighting are useless. The hectic diplomacy between Cairo, Jerusalem, Ankara, Madrid and Berlin seems to be more promising. A quick ceasefire must be the goal."

Berliner Zeitung criticized Israel for disadvantaging Israeli Arabs: "Israel is not a state for all of its citizens who live within its borders, but it is a Jewish state. Arabs do not have the same duties and rights like Jews; they are underprivileged."

Die Tageszeitung said: "Olmert is playing with fire," adding that

"while he should be ashamed and quietly leave his office, he is going out with a big bang. Contrary to the voices of Foreign Minister Livni and Defense Minister Barak, he ordered to continue the fighting in the Gaza Strip. "Once again, the government leader is playing with fire and hesitates to stop the bloodshed. With every day the fighting continues, the danger of mistaken attacks, like the one on the UN school in which Palestinian civilians sought refuge, is increasing. The fighting is taking a heavy toll every day."

13. Gas Dispute

Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung argued: "Many things are still opaque in the gas dispute between Ukraine and Russia. Such as in August when Vladimir Putin sent tanks to Georgia, the suspicions and slanders both sides are using to blame each other can hardly be checked. But as long as the details of the contract have not been published, no one can say what is true and what is fiction in this Russian-Ukrainian intrigue about gas, power, and billions. But beyond propaganda and lies, there are things that are clear: Ukraine's independence is at stake in this conflict. Irrespective of whether Putin's unproven arguments are justified or not, the Russian reaction to alleged Kiev misdemeanors is structured in such a way that it promotes the disintegration scenario, about which great power politicians in Moscow have warned again and again. The option of a destabilization or even division of from Moscow's point of view "artificial" state of Ukraine has been gone through again and again by Russian diplomats. An eastern Slav, orthodox nation, cousins...who want to accede to the EU and NATO is unacceptable for Russians tarred with the same brush as Putin. In Georgia, Putin proved once before that he knows how to take advantage of certain opportunities. Now he is putting the knife to Ukraine's throat."

14. Guantanamo Closure

Many German newspapers reported that "a member of the outgoing government under President Bush has for the first time admitted that torture was used in Guantanamo" (Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung). Tagesspiegel headlined "Legal Official admits torture of Guantanamo detainee." Die Welt and Berliner Zeitung both headlined: "Pentagon admits to torture in Guantanamo." Many papers also note that 61 Guantanamo detainees took up terror activities after they were released from prison camp.

Frankfurter Allgemeine editorialized: "America's case shows that its approach to Islamists does not pay off in the end. What happens is that you cannot charge somebody whose confessions were made under torture. It is honorable of the Bush administration's official for military tribunals in Guantanamo that she also sees it this way. Human rights for terrorists? Yes, even if it is for understandable reasons not popular."

15. Hillary Clinton Hearing

Sueddeutsche Zeitung noted: "In the hearing before Congress, Secretary of State-designate Hillary Clinton announced a foreign policy that is based on 'principles and pragmatism, not rigid ideology,' that is based on 'facts and evidence, not emotions and prejudices.' She spoke of 'soft power,' the use of all means, not only the use of soldiers, to assert national interests. But as a matter of fact, these phrases are more than empty words. Clinton announced a clear break with the previous U.S. foreign policy under George W. Bush and no less than the beginning of a new era." The basic motif could not be overheard: the United States and its secretary of state want to get actively involved in the settlement of conflicts and intensify its diplomatic efforts."

Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung opined: "Everyone is now reading many [new] things in the statements, secretary of state-designate Hillary Clinton made before Congress. But is there really the great turnabout? For instance, Cuba. It cannot be disputed that Washington's boycott policy has not been successful. But Hillary Clinton links travel facilitations to concessions of the Cuban leadership. But what will happen if it remains stubborn? For example, Iran: More diplomatic contacts are planned, but when it comes to the Iranian nuclear program, the future Obama administration is as uncompromising as the Bush administration. It would by no means accept Iran's nuclear arms built-up. We are

anxious to see the bait that the new administration will put down to Iran. But what will happen if Iran does not take the bait? Then everything will go on as before."

Der Tagesspiegel wrote: "There are still political stars right next to the future president. The number of journalists who wanted to attend Hillary Clinton's hearing...before the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Senate was enormous. She enjoyed this attention. But such hearings are a tightrope act. The candidates try to avoid blunt statements which could give reason to vote against his/her appointment. On the other hand, they want to emphasize competence and determination. Hillary Clinton's main message was that she wanted 'more diplomacy and less ideology and confrontation.'"

16. Afghanistan

Berliner Zeitung judged: "Even President-elect Obama's team does not have the panacea to avert a growing disaster in the Hindu Kush, seven years after the expulsion of the radical Islamic Taliban from Kabul. On the contrary, some ideas seem to have been born out of despair. In cooperation with the U.S. embassy in Kabul, President Karzai is about to set up so-called Arbakai, rural Afghan police forces that are to offset the greatest deficiency in the Hindu Kush: they are to confront the Taliban who stop at nothing and are battle-hardened. A similar attempt along the Pakistani-Afghan border failed miserably. In addition, Obama will take over a conflict that has definitely expanded to neighboring Pakistan. For Obama it will become even more difficult to seek a political perspective in the region. Over the past years, President Hamid Karzai lost credibility among his own people, the Pashtuns, because he did not respect any of the promises he made before the elections. George W. Bush always made clear that he would never drop Karzai; it is unclear whether Barack Obama thinks in a similar way. But one thing is certain: there is no alternative to the Afghan president in sight."

17. Obama Inauguration

In the view of weekly Die Zeit, "the situation for Barack Obama will be getting serious next Tuesday. As soon as he has taken his oath, he must shoulder the burden of his job from one moment to the next. There is hardly any other president who has prepared for the burden of his job so carefully and has surrounded himself with such an experienced team as Barack Obama. But there is hardly any other president either who has inherited such profound economic, moral, and foreign policy crises than this president. Next Tuesday, he must prove that his governmental platform was drafted by tough realists. As of January 20, a new, better time will hopefully begin for America and the world. There is no alternative to Obama's new policy. With his friend-foe thinking and his pigheaded keep-the-state-out-of-the-economy ideology, George W. Bush has plunged America and the world into misery. The situation can only improve if the next president changes course and does the opposite of what his predecessor did. There is the great hope that a prospering and virtuous America that has freed itself from high-handedness, will become attractive again, and will have a moderating influence on the despots in Damascus and Tehran and become even attractive to them. This sounds impressive, even though the path to achieving these goals will be infinitely difficult. Nevertheless, America looks optimistically to the end of an era. The best wishes from the whole world accompany the new president."

18. Osama bin Laden Tape

Tagesspiegel commented: "Nothing inhuman is unfamiliar to him. But fortunately, delivering speeches has become his main activity. Osama bin Laden reported back, praising the global economic crisis, calling for Jihad to free Palestine and wonders whether America after Bush would still be able to fight his terror organization.... Bin Laden is exploiting the Gaza war for his purposes. It might well be that he is happy about the misery."